

# A Report to the 46<sup>th</sup> District



Representative **Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney**

Spring 2004

## **Rep. Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney**

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### **Committees:**

Higher Education - *Chair*  
Appropriations  
Commerce and Labor  
Joint Legislative Economic  
Development Committee

Dear Neighbors and Friends:

Thank you for your support and for sharing with me the issues that matter to you. I appreciate all the e-mails, letters, phone calls and your personal visits to me in Olympia. The 2004 legislative session is over, and it's great to be back home in the 46<sup>th</sup> District.

The one certain thing in this 60-day "short" session is that it was not short on challenges.

Last year we filled a \$2.6 billion budget deficit without a general tax increase, and we held the line on taxes again this year. We provided funding for enrollments at our colleges and universities and provided more financial aid for students who might not otherwise have a chance for a higher education. We also made some common-sense reforms that will help our K-12 education system. Unfortunately, a measure that didn't pass was one on which our House members took a stand for democracy: the simple majority vote to pass school levies. The House passed this once again only to see it die in the Senate.

In other areas, House Democrats fought hard and were successful in opening job opportunities in the Seattle area's high-tech sector as well as in rural Washington where unemployment keeps climbing. We secured funding so that children would not lose health care coverage. We also reached an agreement to help home care workers receive a decent salary and benefit. They provide a much-needed service to our elderly.

Regrettably, there were some disappointments, including inadequate investments in our schools and being unable to provide a prescription drug price break to those in need.

Mental health parity to ensure fair mental health coverage passed the House but died in the Senate. Our work is obviously not done. We must continue to work on these issues and others that are important to the citizens of the 46<sup>th</sup> District and this state.

Thank you giving me the opportunity to represent you in Olympia. I look forward to visiting with you and working together to keep our state a great place to live.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Phyllis".

Rep. Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney

# A Report to the 46<sup>th</sup> District

## Representative Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney



### HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is very important to the economy of our state. We must provide an educational system that will enhance the competitiveness of our state's businesses by providing a highly trained and skilled workforce to meet the needs of the high-demand industries as well as all of our diverse small businesses. We must provide access to all our students wishing to achieve their goals for a better education.

This year I sponsored the following legislation that will move us in the direction of strengthening our higher education system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- **Strategic Plans for Branch**

**Campuses:** It has been 15 years since the Legislature created five branch campuses to our research universities, University of Washington and Washington State University. Each has expanded and evolved into a unique entity. Legislation passed this year asks the branch campuses to reaffirm their primary mission of offering upper division and master level education. They are to work with the community colleges in joint admission and joint curriculum to assure students the opportunity to transfer and complete their education. The institutions will recommend a plan for their future evolution using input from businesses, workers, educational partners and the community as they shape future educational opportunities in their region.

- **Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) Role and Responsibilities:**

The state HECB is the pulse center that connects the various components of higher education in Washington. The board helps develop policies, administers state financial aid programs and is an important advocate for both students and the state-wide higher education system.

Following a year of careful study, we crafted legislation to update the HECB mission for the first time since 1985, reaffirming the board's commitment to represent the broad public interest over those of individual institutions and to coordinate with other agencies to create a seamless education system.

- **Improving Transfers Between Institutions of Higher Education:**

Transferring from a two-year institution to a major four year university can sometimes be a challenge. This year we passed a bill that requires the institutions to prepare guidelines and criteria for developing course equivalency so that courses from institution can be transferred and applied towards majors and degrees in the same way as equivalent courses at the receiving institution.

I feel this will help the students to accomplish their degree in a timely fashion and allow for more access to new students.

- **Paying part-time college faculty:**

Our reforms let colleges and universities use collective bargaining to pay part-time faculty on the same days as full-time faculty, avoiding hardship for hard-working instructors

## INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

During years of tight budgets and tough choices, we were forced to make difficult cutbacks. This year, with the economy beginning an upturn, we shored up support for higher education – the fuel for our economic future:

### **Enrollment and Opportunity**

We fund thousands of slots for higher education students and help students get financial aid to continue their education and path to success.

- \$7.1 million for high-demand degrees – such as nursing, computer science, and biotech.
- \$10 million to expand enrollments at community and technical colleges and universities.
- \$4.3 million in Promise Scholarship moneys provide financial aid to beginning college students.

### **Building for the Future**

The 2004 Capital Budget targets \$117 million to improve our colleges and universities:

- \$31.6 million for a new academic center building at WSU Spokane Riverpoint
- \$11 million to the University of Washington for laboratory facilities, classroom upgrades, and infrastructure.
- New buildings, design and repairs at community and technical colleges in Aberdeen, Bellingham, Longview, Port Angeles, Spokane, and Wenatchee.

## THE BEST SCHOOLS

Investing in education topped our agenda in 2004. We had to address the coming rush of college students and foster advanced learning and great job training in our colleges and universities. Leaders in the business and education communities agree that the best way to launch a profitable and rewarding career is with a strong educational foundation.

- **WASL Testing** – I feel very strongly that testing is just one component of a student's learning and assessment and

that we must focus on having a well-rounded educational program. We do have a program in place called the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) that we must continue to review to assure that it is serving in the best interest of the students. In this effort, we made targeted fixes to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL to help students meet tough high school graduation requirements taking effect in 2008. The measure has the support of teachers, administrators, PTA and other education groups because of its focus on fairness for students and teachers.

For more information, please see [www.partnership4learning.org](http://www.partnership4learning.org) or <http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/overview.aspx>.

- **Levy support** – We authorized districts to get the full amount of voter-approved levies avoiding a double-whammy to districts when budgets shrink.
- **Learning Assistance** – We targeted funding to schools that need to raise reading and math scores without punishing schools that are succeeding.



### **Charter Schools**

Charter schools are public schools created by teachers, parents or community leaders. While they are intended to be innovative, high-quality schools that will help struggling students, they are not necessarily accountable to elected school boards. Also, charter schools create another drain on diminishing public school funds for schools that have less public oversight. I support finding new and creative ways to educate students, but the national record on charter schools is getting mixed reviews. I didn't support the bill this session as I believe that we must fully fund our public schools and allow for more flexible and innovative ways to teach our children.

## GOOD-PAYING JOBS

### **Home Health Care Workers**

Home care workers earn just \$8.43 an hour for working strenuous jobs. These workers help to keep seniors and the developmentally disabled in their homes allowing them to be more independent, closer to their families, and saving the state money. This session we approved a new contract for our state's 26,000 home caregivers that gives them a 50-cent-per-hour pay bump plus health benefits

### **Health Care for Small Businesses**

Nearly 40 percent of Washington workers are employed by small businesses, so it is essential that these companies can afford to provide health care coverage. One of the last bills passed in the 2004 session allows businesses with 50 or fewer employees to offer their workers health benefit plans that make coverage more affordable.

### **Tax Breaks for High-Tech with Accountability**

One way to create more jobs in Washington is to provide targeted tax relief to successful companies in biotech, high-tech and other industries. I supported continuing incentives for companies doing research and development in Washington. The bill makes our tax structure competitive with other states. Accountability standards in the law help us know if the breaks meet our aim to create jobs and stabilize our economy.

## AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

### **Medicaid Premiums**

This year's budget eliminates health premiums for Medicaid children whose families earn less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Last year, legislators were forced to begin charging \$5 per month premiums for each child. It was an unfair burden for families trying to scrape by. I will continue to work to eliminate premiums for all children in low-income families.

### **Affordable Prescription Drugs from Canada**

Taxpayers in Washington state spend \$1 billion a year on prescription drugs,



many of which are made in the U.S.A. So why do Americans pay up to three times the price of Canadians? Taxpayers could save \$300 million with medicines purchased in Canada. Citizens, especially seniors, could also save big by shopping online at dependable Canadian pharmacies. **Unfortunately, the Senate refused to allow a vote on this needed reform.**

### ***Mental Health Care that Makes Sense***

I supported a reform to level the field between the brain and the body when it comes to health care. The bill, HB 1828, would have made mental health care on par with medical or surgical services – a common-sense reform that respects medical advances. Twenty percent of Americans will experience anxiety or depression at some point. Only a fraction will get treatment even though we can prevent these illnesses. With fair mental health coverage, workers miss fewer workdays, upping productivity. That makes sense for both employers and employees. **The Senate blocked a vote this year.**

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Transportation supports a thriving and growing economy in Washington. Traffic gridlock costs our state \$2 billion a year in productivity. In the past two years, we made smart investments to get people to work and school to improve our economy.

With a sound transportation package in place, we are moving forward with a plan that invests \$4.2 billion in transportation projects through 2012. An average of 3,200 jobs will be created each year through these targeted investments.

Our plan invests more than \$300 million in the Seattle area to begin renovating highways traveled by millions each year – Interstate 5 and the Alaskan Way viaduct. We kept the momentum going this year with a 10-year plan for state ferries and boosting development at port districts in Pasco, Colville, Kent, Seattle, Fife, Benton County, and Granite Falls. We also funded security measures at ferry terminals and border crossings.



## **PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES**

- **CO<sub>2</sub> Reduction:** I supported a bill to reduce carbon dioxide, a first step in addressing global warming. The bill requires new power plants to offset 20 percent of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, resulting in more trees being planted and more natural gas-powered buses on our roads.



- **No Oil Spills:** We passed a bill directing the Department of Ecology to enforce a "zero-spill" strategy that reduces dangers to the environment.
- **Electronic Waste Management:** Our reform creates a plan to prevent toxic materials in broken or obsolete electronic equipment from harming the environment.
- **Recreation Areas:** Preserving trails and off-road recreation areas was the result of a bill that redistributes funds to the Non-Highway Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program. Roughly \$5 million goes toward trails for hiking, biking, and horses, as well as other improvements. Anglers, campers, hunters and others will benefit.